

12 JUL 1972

Mr. John Cowles, Jr.
Chairman
Harper's Magazine Company
2 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10016

Dear Mr. Cowles:

Harper's July issue contains an article by Mr. Alfred W. McCoy alleging CIA involvement in the opium traffic in Laos. This allegation is false and unfounded, and it is particularly disappointing that a journal of Harper's reputation would see fit to publish it without any effort to check its accuracy or even to refer to the public record to the contrary.

Normally we do not respond publicly to allegations made against CIA. Because of the serious nature of these charges, however, I am writing to you to place these accusations in proper perspective and so that the record will be clear.

The general charge made by Mr. McCoy that "to a certain extent it /the opium trade in Laos/ depends on the support (money, guns, aircraft, etc.) of the CIA" has no basis in fact. To the contrary, Mr. John E. Ingersoll, Director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, in a letter to Representative Charles S. Gubser of California on May 27, 1971 (reproduced in the Congressional Record of June 2, 1971), stated:

"Actually, CIA has for sometime been this Bureau's strongest partner in identifying foreign sources and routes of illegal trade in narcotics. Their help has included both direct support in intelligence collection, as well as in intelligence analysis and production. Liaison between our two agencies is close and constant in matters of mutual interest. Much of the progress we

- 2 -

are now making in identifying overseas narcotics traffic can, in fact, be attributed to CIA cooperation."

Mr. McCoy makes the following charges which I shall deal with specifically:

(a) General Vang Pao, "commander of the CIA secret army in northeastern Laos...has become an increasingly notorious entrepreneur in the Laotian drug trade."

We have no evidence indicating that General Vang Pao is involved in the Laotian drug trade. Because his forces are the principal Laotian deterrent to North Vietnamese aggression, many U. S. Government personnel have been in constant contact with General Vang Pao for a number of years. No evidence has come to light connecting him with narcotics trafficking.

On the contrary, General Vang Pao has strongly supported the antinarcotics legislation passed by the Lao National Assembly in 1971 and, as a leader of the Meo, has done his best to influence the tribal groups to abandon their traditional growth of the opium poppy and develop substitute crops and new forms of livestock to provide daily sustenance and income.

Further, most of northeastern Laos is not under General Vang Pao's control but actually in the hands of the North Vietnamese. General Vang Pao obviously has no control over the crop cultivation there, and cultivation of any crop in that area is extremely difficult because of the ongoing hostilities.

(b) The CIA assurance of food supplies to the Laotian Meo tribesmen allowed the Meo to "allot more land to the growing of opium."

This allegation would not be made by anyone familiar with the war-ravaged economy of the Meo tribe. The U. S.

- 3 -

Government provides food to Mee refugees -- Mees who have been driven off their land by the North Vietnamese and therefore have no land to cultivate -- and to villages where the bulk of the male population is off serving in General Vang Pao's forces.

Prior to the North Vietnamese offensive, supplies were delivered to the Mee tribesmen. Those supplies, however, consisted of rice seedlings and other types of seeds plus livestock to provide the Mee with basic sustenance and also to encourage the Mee to give up the planting of opium poppies. These efforts met with considerable success. Mr. Roland Paul, investigator for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, reported in the April 1971 issue of Foreign Affairs "that due to the long association with the CIA, the Mee tribesmen in Laos were shifting from opium to rice and other crops."

The fact is that the opium production in northeastern Laos has been greatly diminished rather than increased as alleged in the McCoy article.

(c) When Air America became the only air transport available, "it began flying Mee opium to markets in Long Cheng and Vientiane."

Air America has long had an effective inspection system, and more recently an even more rigid system to bar even inadvertent transport of narcotics has been introduced. Air America released a statement to the press on June 2, 1972, which said:

"There is an intensive program of inspection of both passengers and cargo carried out in close collaboration with local and U. S. authorities. At up-country sites, inspectors inspect all baggage of passengers and crew members departing from their stations. All cargo placed aboard up-country sites is inspected by members of the inspection service. All baggage of persons departing Vientiane on Air

- 4 -

America, Continental Air Services and Lao Air Development are inspected. Where boarding passengers refuse to submit to inspection or are found to have contraband in their possession, they are denied the right to board the aircraft and their names are turned over to local Lao authorities. Through these and related measures attempts by individuals to carry opium on company airplanes have been detected and prevented. These small time smugglers and users are the greatest threat and the security inspection service has constituted an effective deterrent."

Please note that these tightened security and inspection measures predate Mr. McCoy's charges against Air America.

(d) After the North Vietnamese offensive in northeastern Laos, "Vang Pao was able to continue his role in Laos's narcotics trade by opening a heroin laboratory at Long Cheng, the CIA headquarters town."

There is not only no evidence connecting General Vang Pao with a heroin laboratory in Long Cheng, but also none to suggest the presence of such a laboratory in Long Cheng. There are a number of U. S. Government officials in Laos working against the drug traffic. They would have spotted such a laboratory in Long Cheng and seen to its dismantling had one existed.

(e) "CIA contract airlines have reportedly carried opium, and individual CIA men have abetted the opium traffic."

This charge is also false. CIA is not involved in the narcotics traffic and is actively working against it; its personnel are also flatly prohibited from any such activity as individuals, and are subject to termination if so involved. Mr. McCoy has produced no evidence which implicates Agency personnel in the narcotics traffic. Such unsupported charges against this Agency and its people of abetting the flow of narcotics are not only irresponsible but particularly ironic in view of the many efforts this Agency's personnel are making to stem the flow of narcotics into the United States.

- 5 -

More than one year ago, in an address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Mr. Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence, stated the following:

"There is the arrant nonsense, for example, that the Central Intelligence Agency is somehow involved in the world drug traffic. We are not. As fathers, we are as concerned about the lives of our children and grandchildren as are all of you. As an Agency, in fact, we are heavily engaged in tracing the foreign roots of the drug traffic for the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. We hope we are helping with a solution; we know we are not contributing to the problem."

This statement remains valid today.

I trust you will give this response the same prominence in your publication as was given to the McCoy article.

Sincerely,

/s/

W. E. Colby
Executive Director

OGC/LRH:jeb

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